

Open Up the Textbook (OUT)

How Did the Civil War Begin? What Really Happened at Fort Sumpter?

Enlarge

Complicate

Contest

Vivify

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In this OUT analysis, 7th grade level students will study the bombing of Ft. Sumter in order to better understand how the Civil War began. This OUT analysis provides students with documents that are meant to deliberately enlarge and complicate the textbook.

Source A: The Textbook – Holt, United States History, William Devereil, Deborah Gray White, Page 511

In 1861, that spark occurred at Fort Sumter, a federal outpost in Charleston, South Carolina, that was attacked by Confederate troops, beginning the Civil War. Determined to seize the fortress--which controlled the entrance to Charleston harbor the Confederates ringed the harbor with heavy guns. Instead of surrendering the fort, Lincoln decided to send in ships to provide badly needed supplies to defend the fort. Confederate officials demanded that the federal troops evacuate. The fort's commander, Major Robert Anderson refused.

Before sunrise on April 12, 1861, Confederate guns opened fire on Fort Sumter. A witness wrote that the first shots brought "every soldier in the harbor to his feet, and every man, woman, and child in the city of Charleston from their beds." The Civil War had begun.

Source A Questions for Consideration

1. What and where is Fort Sumter? Why is it an strategic and important location?
2. According to the text, what did Lincoln do instead of surrendering the fort?
3. What were Confederate officials demanding?
4. Why would the Confederate Army want to seize the fort?
5. What do you think is meant from the quote, "every soldier in the harbor to his feet, and every man, woman and child from their beds"?
6. Do you think this account is an accurate description of the attack on Fort Sumter? Why or Why not?

Source B: Notes on the Surrender of Fort Sumter (Modified), Primary Source– A.R. Chisolm, Colonel of the Confederate Army. April 12, 1861

...I then informed the governor that it would be necessary for General Beauregard [General of the Confederate States Army] to have an aide-de-camp who was familiar with the harbor and with boating; that I was the owner of a large six-oared boat and six superior oarsmen, that were at his service free of cost. I was thereupon commissioned lieutenant-colonel, and ordered to report to General Beauregard.

Having visited Fort Sumter five times under a flag of truce, and once after the surrender, I became well acquainted with most of its officers. During a visit in company..., the officers jokingly complained of being short of cigars and like luxuries. With General Beauregard's approval, the next time duty called us to the fort we presented them with several cases of claret and boxes of cigars.

April 12th, 1861, I visited the fort in company with James Chesnut, Jr., and Captain Stephen D. Lee with the demand for its surrender, and heard Major Anderson say in conversation with us, "I shall await the first shot, and if you do not batter us to pieces we shall be starved out in a few days." These words being communicated to General Beauregard, we were again sent to the fort, arriving there about 1:30 a. m., April 12th. After waiting nearly two hours for a reply, we sent word to Major Anderson that our orders did not admit of our waiting any longer. He came to where we were in the guard-room, and informed us "that we had twice fired on his flag, and that if we did so again he would open his fire on our batteries." Under our instructions this reply admitted of no other answer than the one dated April 12th, 1861, 3:20 a. m.

The facts of the surrender of Fort Sumter...are these: General Beauregard, seeing the fort on fire, sent me with a note to General James Simons, commanding on Morris Island, to offer assistance in extinguishing the fire... Major Anderson was about to renew the action, when Major David R. Jones arrived with the offer of terms for the surrender of the fort, which were virtually almost anything that Anderson might ask, in order that we might get possession before the [Union] fleet could reinforce and provision the garrison.

I have always been of the opinion that Major Anderson should not have surrendered when he did. The fire only consumed the officers' and men's quarters; the two magazines were uninjured, only one man had been wounded, the walls were secure, and he still had provisions which would have sustained his small command until the fleet could both have provisioned and re enforced him. I was present... during the evacuation, and was astonished to see barrels of pork being rolled out and shipped on board the Isabel, the steamer furnished by General Beauregard to transport Anderson's men to the fleet.

Source B Questions for Consideration

1. Who is the author of this report? According to the first paragraph, what qualified him for his position in the Confederate Army?
2. Although the Civil War becomes a highly divisive conflict, this report is full of respectful and friendly terms and interactions. Reread the report and cite examples of these respectful and friendly terms between the two armies.
3. Which army was the first to attack in this battle? How did the other side respond to the attack?
4. In the final paragraph, Chisholm states, "I have always been of the opinion that Major Anderson should not have surrendered when he did." What reasons does he give to support this claim?
5. According to the document, what the terms for the surrender of the fort (what was demanded of the Union Forces)?
6. Read back through your answers. What two or three details that enlarge or complicate the text book account. List them below.

Source C: Telegram: Announcing the Surrender of Fort Sumter, Major Robert Anderson, April 18, 1861

SS. BALTIC. OFF SANDY HOOK APR. EIGHTEENTH. TEN THIRTY A.M. VIA NEW YORK. . HON.S.CAMERSON. SECY.WAR. WASHN. HAVING DEFENDED FORT SUMTER FOR THIRTY HOURS UNTIL THE QUARTERS WERE ENTIRELY BURNED THE MAIN GATES DESTROYED BY FIRE. THE GORGE WALLS SERIOUSLY INJURED. THE MAGAZINE SURROUNDED BY FLAMES AND ITS DOOR CLOSED FROM THE EFFECTS OF HEAT. FOUR BARRELS AND THREE CARTRIDGES OF POWDER ONLY BEING AVAILABLE AND NO PROVISIONS REMAINING BUT PORT. I ACCEPT TERMS OF EVACUATION OFFERED BY GENERAL BEAUREGARD BEING ON SAME OFFERED BY HIM ON THE ELEVENTH INST. PRIOR TO THE COMMENCEMENT OF HOSTILITIES AND MARCHED OUT OF THE FORT SUNDAY AFTERNOON THE FOURTEENTH INST. WITH COLORS FLYING AND DRUMS BEATING. BRINGING AWAY COMPANY AND PRIVATE PROPERTY AND SALUTING MY FLAG WITH FIFTY GUNS. ROBERT ANDERSON. MAJOR FIRST ARTILLERY. COMMANDING.

Source C Questions for Consideration

1. What do you learn about this document from the sourcing information in the top two lines?
2. According to Major Anderson, what damage to Fort Sumter had occurred? Does his report agree or conflict with the account from Colonel Chisolm in Source B. Cite three pieces of evidence from both sources that supports your answer.
3. According to the document, what supplies are still available at Fort Sumter?
4. How does Anderson describe his departure from Fort Sumter?

Source D: “Focusing on the Prize” Jamie Malanowski. New York Times Blog Post. March 20, 2011

Just a few days before his inauguration, in a meeting with delegates to the Virginia secession commission, Lincoln broached the possibility of yielding Sumter in exchange for Virginia’s pledge to remain in the union. Lincoln fairly blurted the idea in a way that almost seemed unserious. But more and more, Virginia seems to hold the key to the controversy: if she stays, the seceded states are a breakaway republic that faces long odds of success, but if she leaves, other states will accompany her, and suddenly the Confederacy would become a going concern, with a government that might win diplomatic recognition from the powers of Europe.

If you can believe Thurlow Weed, Lincoln has three times in recent days returned to the idea of yielding Sumter in order to strengthen the hand of Virginia’s unionists. The risks are high: if he relieves Sumter and Virginia secedes, he has erred; if he cedes Sumter and Virginia goes anyway, he has erred even more egregiously.

Source D Questions for Consideration

1. What do you learn about this document from the sourcing information?
2. Jamie Malinowski is a writer and historian of the Civil War. What is the controversial decision he is describing in this text?
3. Whom was Lincoln meeting with? What was the purpose of this meeting?
4. What reasons are given for Lincoln consideration to yield Fort Sumter?
5. Malinowski points out that Virginia “hold the key to the controversy.” What does he mean by this? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Source E: Video Clip: Lecture on The Sumter Crisis, 1861: “And the War Came.” Professor David Blight, Yale University.

<https://youtu.be/mW5tiuRuNm0> (Start: 12:15/ Stop: 27:29)



Source E Questions for Consideration

1. According to Professor Blight, what had happened by April 1861 to Federal installations (forts, post offices, court houses) in the seven seceded states?
2. What stand was Lincoln making in his inauguration speech? Why is this important?
3. Which negotiations were taking place in February prior to the attack?
4. Blight describes Lincoln’s hope for “voluntary reconstruction” and “Union sentiment” in the South. In your own words, describe what Lincoln was hoping for.
5. William Seward was one of Lincoln’s advisors. What was his position on Fort Sumter?
6. What did Lincoln do to that Confederate officials considered a direct challenge? What happened as a result?

Writing Task

This is an informational writing task based on NVACS standards

CCSS 7.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts and information through the selection, organization and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS 7.2B Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

CCSS 7.3 C Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the texts as well as the ways in which the textbook was enlarged and complicated.

How did the Civil War begin? What happened at Fort Sumter?

- Answer the above question in approximately one paragraph using evidence from at least three of the texts provided.
- Write a clear thesis and provide 3 pieces of evidence to support your idea. After each piece of evidence cited in a direct quote or paraphrase (your own words), please add the source letter in parentheses, for example (Source B).
- For each piece of evidence, clearly reason (explain) why this piece of evidence helps support your thesis. Underline your reasoning. Reasoning can be in the same sentence or the evidence or come before or after the sentence that includes the evidence.
- Choose [2,3,4] of the important vocabulary terms from the box below to include in your writing. Add at least two context clues for each term to demonstrate your understanding. Circle your context clues for each term.